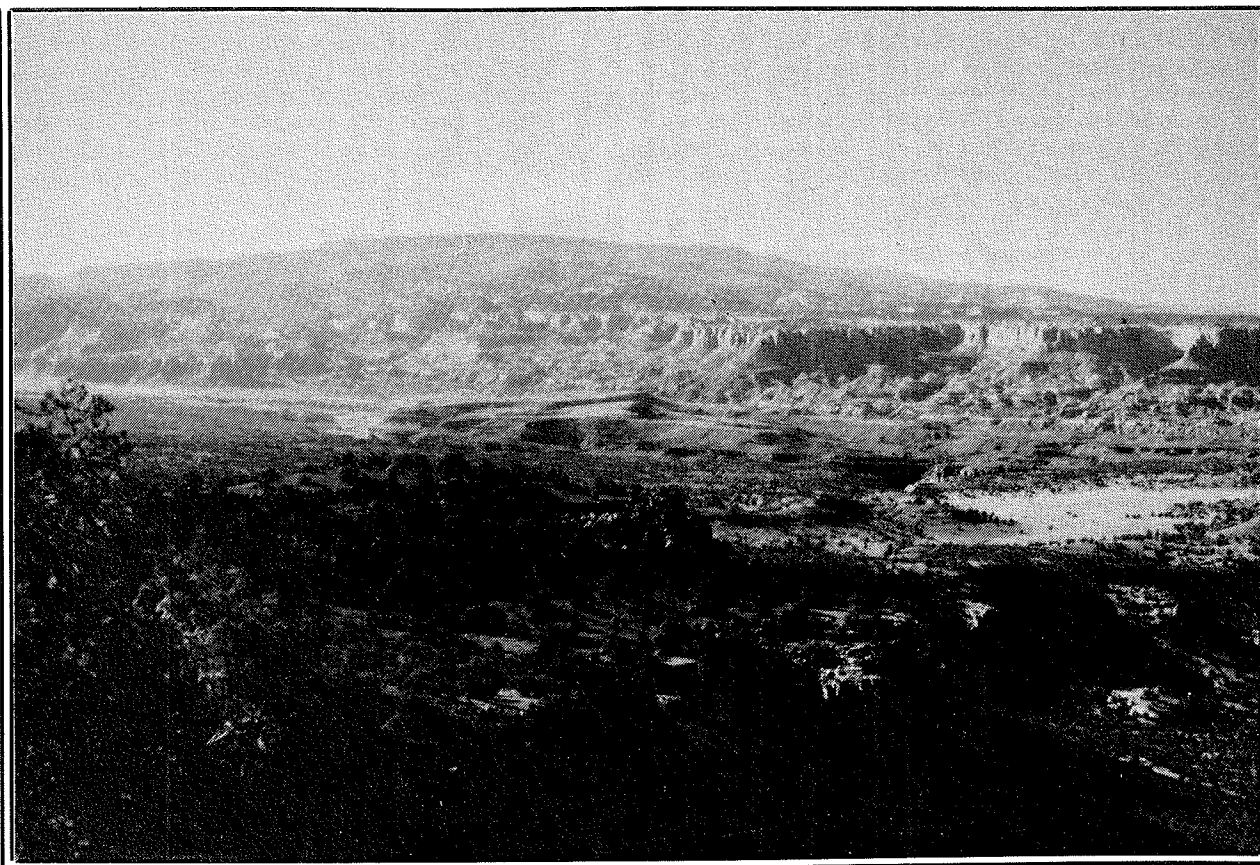


# Fremont Gorge

## WSA



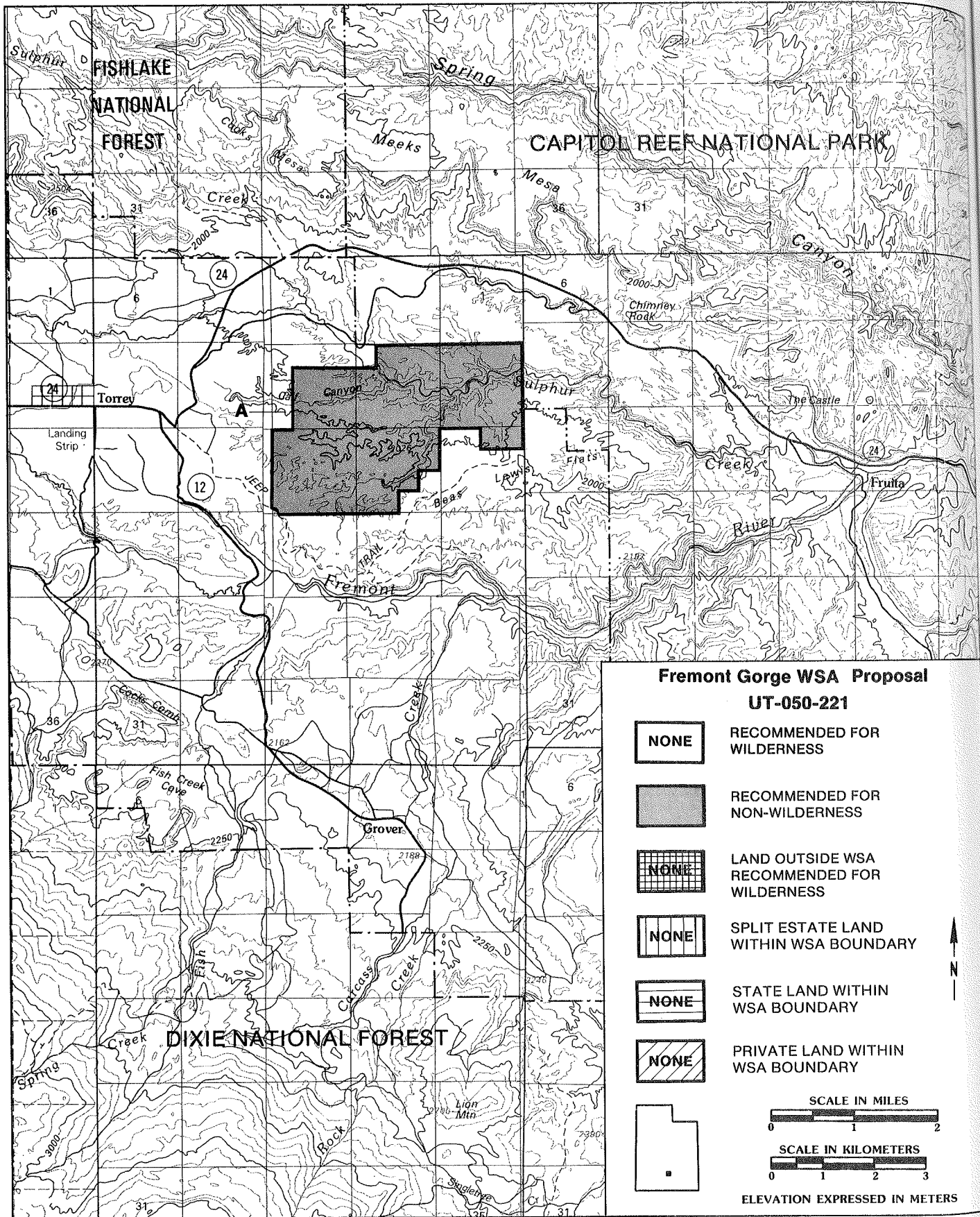
# FREMONT GORGE WSA

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# FREMONT GORGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

## 1. THE STUDY AREA: 2,540 acres

The Fremont Gorge Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-050-221) is in Wayne County, about 3 miles east of Torrey, Utah (population 140). The study area extends about 2 miles from north to south and 3 miles from east to west. The WSA boundaries are along section and subsection lines. The unit is adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park on the north and for about 1 mile on the east (see Map). The WSA contains 2,540 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). No non-Federal lands are within the WSA (see Table 1).

The WSA is in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province.

The study area is on a broad plateau that slopes gently north-northeast, and is intricately dissected by deep, narrow, meandering canyons that drain eastward into the Fremont River. Narrow, relatively flat-topped ridges separate the canyons. Elevations in the WSA range from 6,000 feet on the east side where Sulphur Creek leaves the WSA to 6,800 feet in the southwestern portion. Vegetation is predominantly scattered pinyon-juniper with associated grasses.

The WSA was dropped from wilderness study status by the Secretary of the Interior on December 30, 1982 due to its small size. As a result of a Federal Court Decision, April 18, 1985, the unit was returned to WSA status.

TABLE 1  
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	2,540
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0
Total	2,540
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	0
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	2,540
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	2,540
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

## FREMONT GORGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The WSA was analyzed in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990, in accordance with provisions of Sections 202 and 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and BLM guidance that addresses wilderness consideration for areas smaller than 5,000 acres if such areas are adjacent to land with wilderness potential that is administered by other Federal agencies. The WSA is adjacent to a 4,060-acre area in Capitol Reef National Park that is under consideration by the National Park Service (NPS) for wilderness designation. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness (no action) alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and an all wilderness alternative.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

- 0 acres  
(recommended for wilderness)
- 2,540 acres  
(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all of the area for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however, would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The WSA is in a natural condition and has outstanding opportunities for solitude, but it lacks outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation.

The WSA meets wilderness criteria only when considered together with the adjacent portion of Capitol Reef National Park, and the NPS considers it to be only a buffer zone to the Park. The WSA is therefore insignificant in its value and contribution to the Park and, in consideration of its wilderness values, is unsuitable for wilderness designation.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. All of the Fremont Gorge WSA is in a natural condition. There is only a 0.75 mile of substantially unnoticeable vehicular way. No surface-disturbing activities have occurred since the wilderness inventory.

##### B. Solitude

The entire WSA meets the criteria for outstanding opportunities for solitude when considered together with the contiguous NPS lands.

Although the WSA is of comparatively small size, several winding canyons, as much as 200 feet deep in the Sulphur Creek and Calf Creek drainages, contribute to the opportunities for solitude. The scattered pinyon-juniper woodland vegetation does not enhance opportunities for solitude. There are no outside sights and sounds that would have an adverse effect on solitude anywhere in the WSA.

##### C. PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION

The overall quality of the opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation is below average and does not meet the criteria for outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The WSA has opportunities for 10 different activities. Hiking, nature study, photography, and geological sightseeing are only of average quality, however, and all other primitive recreational opportunities the remaining activities are below average quality.

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are evaluated by considering miles of potential hiking

## FREMONT GORGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

routes in relationship to the WSA's size, the number of recreational opportunities present, and an evaluation of the quality of these opportunities.

### D. Special Features

The WSA has scenic, botanical, and ecological special features. Ecological and botanical features are related to high quality riparian habitat along Sulfur Creek. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles, listed as endangered species, may frequent the WSA. Five special status animal species and two special status plant species may also occur in the WSA. Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

### Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

#### A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference and is

not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely juniper-pinyon woodland (2,540 acres), which is well represented in the NWPS nationally and in other BLM study areas in Utah and other States.

This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

#### B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is within a 5-hour drive of the Salt Lake City, Utah and Provo-Orem, Utah standard metropolitan statistical areas. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated wilderness and other BLM study areas within a 5-hour drive of these population centers.

#### C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Fremont Gorge WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January, 1987, the NWPS included 93 areas comprising 5,475,207 acres in Utah and in Arizona and Colorado, the adjacent states nearest the WSA.

TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,141,465
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,703,658

Source: BLM File Data.

## FREMONT GORGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

**TABLE 3**  
**WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS**

POPULATION CENTERS	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah	11	1,099,962	78	2,220,875
Provo-Orem, Utah	11	721,793	90	2,784,328

Source: BLM File Data.

A Fremont Gorge Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau where there are just two established wilderness areas totaling 70,751 acres. There are three designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. To the southeast is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness and to the south-southwest are the 25,751-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness and 7,000-acre Ashdown gorge wilderness. All three are administered by the U.S. Forest Service (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The WSA could be effectively managed to preserve the wilderness values now in the area. Existing uses, such as livestock grazing would continue but would not affect management of wilderness values in the study area.

There are no mineral leases or mining claims, in-holdings, rights-of-way or other valid rights in the WSA that would complicate wilderness management.

### Energy and Mineral Resource Values

Because the WSA is not recommended for wilderness designation, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) did not prepare a mineral assessment report for the area. According to BLM geologists, the potential for undiscovered oil and gas resources in the WSA is moderate. The potential for undiscovered metallic mineral resources, including uranium, is low. Deposits of excellent building stone are present in the WSA, but similar sources are also available outside the study area.

### Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

### Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

### Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 42 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 51 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 40 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 4 commenters were opposed. Seven commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.



## FREMONT GORGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Those favoring wilderness commented that the WSA has wilderness characteristics, special features, and outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation, and that wilderness designation would not be in conflict with other resource uses, would protect wildlife and wildlife habitat, and would complement management of adjacent Capitol Reef National Park. The majority of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from urban and rural Utah.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would restrict flood and erosion control and cause water right problems, would not be compatible with multiple use, would harm State and local economies, and there is no need for more wilderness. Most of those opposing wilderness designation were from rural Utah.

One Federal Agency, the NPS, commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA. The NPS noted that the Fremont River was deleted from the maps used to show the location of the Fremont River Gorge.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are no State in-holdings in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State ranked this WSA last in the region for both wilderness values and conflicts. Due to the small size of the WSA and because it is adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park, the State believes additional study should be given to possible transfer of this WSA from the BLM to the NPS.

The WSA is entirely within Wayne County. The Wayne County Master Planning Report does not identify recommendations at specific locations. The plan recognizes that "... outstanding natural landmarks should be preserved as much as possible." However, it also states that "Open spaces should be used for many purposes rather than strictly as wilderness areas." The Wayne County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation for this WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response

to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Commission stated that because this area is an integral part of Capitol Reef, and because the wash area has high scenic value and provides some visual protection to the entrance to Capitol Reef National Park, the area should be included in the park rather than designated as BLM administered wilderness.

# FREMONT GORGE WSA

Table 4  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives	
	Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (2,540 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values would not be preserved by wilderness designation. However, wilderness values would not be significantly affected in the foreseeable future because no disturbance is anticipated. Vehicular use of a 0.75 mile of way would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the WSA. Increased visitor use would not affect wilderness values because use is generally primitive in nature and associated with access to the Capitol Reef National Park which is large enough to accommodate an increase in visitation. Nondesignation would not complement NPS goals for wilderness management of contiguous NPS lands.	Wilderness designation would preserve wilderness values throughout the entire WSA. Increased visitor use would be primitive in nature and would be easily absorbed in contiguous NPS lands so no impacts to wilderness values would result. This alternative would complement the wilderness management of contiguous NPS lands.
Impacts on Water Resources	This alternative would not alter present or future water quality or uses because additional disturbance is not expected and no additional restrictions would be placed on access construction or use of water upstream of or within the WSA.	Future water quality and upstream uses would not be significantly affected by this alternative. Constraints for protection of wilderness values in the WSA would not add appreciably to existing constraints for the protection of park values in Capitol Reef National Park.